

A N
ARGUMENT
 F O R
 Toleration and Indulgence,
 In Relation to
D I F F E R E N C E S
 I N
O P I N I O N :

Both as it is the
I N T E R E S T of STATES,
 And as a Common
Duty of all Christians
 One to Another.
 By way of **L E T T E R.**

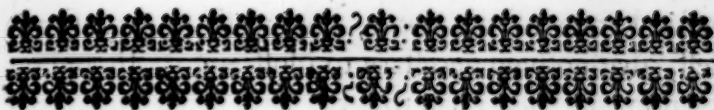
By a Country Gentleman. C. Whitaker

Gamaliel, Acts 5. 38, 39.
Refrain from these Men, and let them alone, (for if this Counsel, or this Work be of Men, it will come to nought; but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it,) lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.

L O N D O N, Printed by T. Snowden, for Benj. Alsop, at the Angel and Bible in the Poultry, over against the Compter. 1681.

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Sir,

I Know not whether the Discourse I held (the other day,) concerning Toleration and Liberty of Conscience, will answer the expectations you conceive of it; but I well know the Obligations I am under, to give you all the satisfaction I am capable of giving, which if you do not find in the Matter, in the Method, and in the Stile and Expressions of the *Relation* I send, I am sure you cannot chuse but find some in the proof I give of my Obedience in sending it. Be pleased therefore to receive the Narration (of what was then said) in the very words, in which, for mine own remembrance, (at my return home) I noted it; not indeed in the Interlocutory way, in which it passed, (and that to avoid Repetitions,) but by way of one continued Discourse, but so ordered, that you will certainly become informed (and perhaps with more advantage, than if a Notary had taken it,) in the substance of all that was offered on both sides.

Being asked my Opinion concerning Liberty of Consci-

Conscience; without entring into a formal and scholastical State of the *Matter*, hoping so to express myself, that nothing necessary to illustrate it, should be wanting in what I had to say; I presently answered, That to understand it, we must distinguish points of *Faith* from points of *Opinion*. By Points of Faith (said I) I mean all things clearly and plainly revealed in the Holy Scriptures, whether they be things to be believed only, or also to be done and practised: By Points of Opinion, I mean all things whatsoever, not plainly and clearly revealed. Which said, I added, That we ought to bear with one another in respect of different Opinions, as God doth bear with us all; who, had he intended we should be all of one Opinion, as he did we should be all of one Faith, he could have made every thing as clear, and plain in the Holy Scripture, and as undoubted as any: But it is for the carrying on of his own most wise and righteous ends of Providence in the World, that he hath left *some things* less plain and clear, and less easie to be understood and determined, than others; as *Matters* both to exercise the reasonable faculties of good and pious men, and to afford them *Subjects* of mutual Charity and Forbearance, in their different sentiments and apprehensions about *them*. And if it hath pleased God (as it hath either for the mentioned, or other Reasons) to leave some matters in dispute, and doubtful, and in such
a State

a State, as we can only guess at them, and that they look with divers Aspects and Countenances, according to the divers Lights in which they are seen, and the divers stands and positions from which: Why should we presume to be wiser than God, and think to put (absolutely and universally) out of doubt, that which he hath not? These changeable Opinions may be as much for the Ornament of the Moral World, as changeable Colours are for the Ornament of the Natural. We must in them bear and indulge.

But instead of Bearing and Indulging, to compel a Person to serve the Deity, in a *Way* against the light and apprehensions he hath of what he ought to do, as to it, is the greatest Tyranny that can be: For it is to compel him to the doing of a thing, which, on pain of Damnation, he holds himself obliged not to do; for no Person can hold himself obliged to worship God, but in the way he believes that God himself would have him; the which only he is to do on the pain of damnation: so that if by forcible courses, he be induced to serve him otherwise, he is compelled to do a thing that on the pain of damnation he believes he ought not. And how Tirannical is this, to so Dilemma! and how dreadful to be so Dilemma'd! Either not to worship so, and be ruined now; or worship so, and be damned hereafter. A hard choice!

Again, for any to comply with a way of Worship imposed

imposed on him by man, which he believeth not the true, required by God; It is not to obey and serve God, but man: For (by way of Illustration) let us make a supposal, That a Master biddeth three or four of his servants do such or such a thing, and that the servants differ about the sense and meaning of the Command, one understanding it one way, another another way, a third in this way, the fourth in that; all are servants, and consequently, equal in respect of the Masters command, and therefore none hath any right of imposing (a sense on the others.) In this case, should all the rest of the Servants *act as one* of them would have, who undertakes to tell them his private sentiments, and what, in his thoughts, the Master doth mean, if the sense and meaning which he gives them (of the Masters Command) be all the while against the Judgment of their own discretion (about it;) for them to act *so*, is not to obey and serve their Master, but a fellow Servant. And this is our case; we all are equally servants, and obliged to no other rule of Obedience, but the Masters word of Command: Indeed some Servants are to bring that Word to others, but those to whom they bring it, are not bound to their sense of it, further than they are persuaded it is the Masters. *Search the Scriptures; and Try the Spirits; We have but one Master, who is God.*

And God is so good a Master, that if a Servant do
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sincerely intend Obedience to him, and use his best endeavour to understand his Command, as he would have him, and yet after all mistake; I say God is so good a Master, that he will not accept according to what a Servant hath not, but according to what he hath; He will graciously consider the prompt, and ready Obedience, and good Intention of his Servant, and not severely reflect on the error or mistake of which he is guilty; which, being not willed, is benignly taken, and understood as more his Unhappiness and Infelicity, than Sin and Fault: For, *If our hearts condemn us not, we have confidence towards God.* He principally regards the Heart, My Son give me thy Heart; so that if the Heart be upright, and the aim single, though the Hand miscarry, and the Foot slip, yet, in Divine Interpretation, the whole Body is full of Light: It Pleasing God in Infinite Goodness, to respect the Will, the Intention, the sincere Endeavour of his Servants; and for the rest, to put it upon humane Weakness and Infirmary, that Weakness and Infirmary which he will pardon. And if God himself have so much tenderness and Compassion for humane Weakness and Imperfection, shall men themselves have none for one anothers?

Further, to be rigid and severe to others in matters of Opinion, is not to comport with the Golden Rule of all our Actions prescribed by our blessed Saviour, which is to do as we would be done unto; would'st

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thou be compelled thy self, that dost compel others? Nor is it to use such proper and convenient Methods as are necessary for the working of belief; the understanding being a faculty that cannot be forced, or constrained any more than the Will. Belief may be persuaded, but cannot be compelled. Arguments and Reasons (and not *Capiases* and Imprisonments, Fire and Fagot,) are proper means to effect it; thus the *Antient Fathers* in all their Apologies to the Heathen, in defence of themselves, and the Christian Religion, ever pleaded. Besides, Forceable courses never answered their Ends; Persecution of a Doctrine doth but spread it: The Christian Religion had never extended so far in so short time as it did, but for the violence used toward it. The Blood of the Martyrs was the Seed of the Church.

Nor is that a thing of small Moment (neither) which is insisted on by some, that where the understanding is not led by the light it hath to the Approbation of a *Worship*, all Conformity *thereto* is but Hypocrisie; that to compel the outward man unto a compliance against the Dictates of the inward, (which may be done, and is all that can be done by violent, and forcible courses) is but to make as many Hypocrites as Worshipers; and so instead of honouring God (which is the end of *Worship*,) to give him the greatest distaste, and to do him the greatest affront that can be. Such Differences! what man would like them? and how shall God? I

I add, that Conscience as it is taken for the Principle that bindeth us to act in the things of God, and with immediate reference to him, is not under the Government and Power of the Magistrate; this inward man is of the Kingdom of Christ, and under his direction and conduct, by the Word and Spirit; *The Kingdom of Heaven is within you.* God hath not by his Son, our blessed Saviour, the only Prophet we are bid to hear, obliged Magistrates to superintend in *Matters of his Worship*, and to give directions about *them*, (except perhaps in some *Circumstances*) or to use their Magistratical, and coercive Power over their Subjects in relation to *them*: he would not *trust* any in matters so immediately concerning himself, and of such Importance; but hath reserved the regulating and directing of his *Worship*, and of all things properly pertaining to *it*, unto himself by his word; which all, both Magistrates and People are obliged to obey. And indeed this was the great Principle, on which the first Reformers proceeded (in the Reformation,) that nothing ought to be imposed upon Christians in matters of Faith, or of Practice in Life, or Worship, but what is plainly intimated in the Scriptures; or, that the Scriptures are the only Rule of Faith, Worship and Manners; a Principle that restored the Christian Liberty, long oppressed with the Tyranny of humane and Antichristian Impositions; and a Principle that duly settled and conformed to, will likely prove a re-

medy (and haply is the only true one) to all the Distractions, Schisms and Ruptures now among Christians. A Toleration, or Indulgence, according to this Principle, is the most hopeful Basis and Foundation of Settlement.

But here it was urged on the contrary, *That the Magistrates and Kings of Judah, were invested in a Power to coerce Blasphemers and Idolaters : They broke down the Images, destroyed the Groves, and put to death the Priests that ministred ; and the Christian Magistrate should seem invested in the same Powers, in order to preserve the true Christian Religion, that the Jewish had for theirs ; and consequently , that he hath a Power of coercing too.*

But as for the Powers of the Kings of Judah, though it be admitted, that they had a Power, in some cases, of coercing even to death in matters of Religion ; yet it will not follow, that Christian Governours have (the same ;) for the dispensation under which the former were, was a terrible dispensation, and went on other Maxims than the new doth ; in which Christians are ; that was the Dispensation of a Servant, *this* of a Son ; that more accommodated to the Rules of Humane Wisdom, *this* of Divine ; they had a worldly Sanctuary, and consequently used worldly Methods ; but the Kingdom of Christ is not of this world, and the Weapons in it are not Carnal, but Spiritual.

Besides, it may be said, That even then it was mainly in relation to Idolatry and Blasphemy, that the Jewish

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ish Magistrates were vested in that sanguinary Power ; and Idolatry sets up a false God, and *Blasphemy* is so highly against the true, that This as well as That is treasonable : and therefore in a Kingdom which recognized God for Sovereign King, and in whose very Civils (may I so express it) their Religion was inlay'd, (their Religion being the Basis and Foundation of their State, and their Civil and Religious Laws being all of one Sanction, and in one Volume ;) for them to punish in the Instances alledged, was but to punish High-Treason.

And let it be observed, that I never did intend that *Atheists, Blasphemers* of the true God, and *Enemies to natural Religion*, (without which no Government or Common-Wealth can stand) should be exempted from punishment ; for not to punish *these*, is to be false and treacherous to Government itself ; It as much importing that Atheists, Blasphemers, and Enemies to natural Religion, should be punished *Capitally*, as Enemies to all Government, (seeing without Religion there can be none) as that Treasons against this or that particular State should be *so*.

But I think the Magistrate is not invested by the Lord Christ, in any Powers of Coercion with relation to the Christian Religion, as it is Christian Religion, because, (as I said before) it is the Kingdom of Heaven, and not of this World, and therefore not to be set up

or maintained in a worldly way; but as it was set up at first, so it must be continued still in heavenly Methods, by the Word of God, and by the holy Spirit accompanying it; the same being the only proper means of Continuation, and Preservation, that were of Inchoation, and Production; and let these (means) be used.

Only, where the Christian Religion is inlayed with the State, and become a matter of civil Sanction, and Establishment by Law, there it ought to be maintained and preserved by the Magistrate, and that with the power of the Sword, and such Coercion as the State invests him in; but this is not simply as it is the Christian Religion, but on a civil account, and with respect to the State, as it is become a Stone in that Building, and hath a place in the Laws of it; and it is proper for Christian People to settle Christian Religion by Law.

But still (as I said at first) Distinction must be made between Christian Religion, or points of Faith (contained, as to the things to be believed only, in the *Creed*, commonly called the *Apostles*, & stiled by *Ireneus* the Catholic Faith) between that & matters of Opinion; it being unsafe for any Government to inlay in its Foundation any Opinion that is disputable, and doubtful. To build a Government upon an Opinion that is disputable and doubtful, is to build a House on the Sand, and to lay a weak Foundation; and a weak Foundation will deceive the Structure: whereas to build it on the true Religion

ligion, or that Christian and Catholick *Faith*, which is established & confirmed with uncontroulable reasons, and from Heaven with the Authority of Miracles, is to build on a Rock. To build on Opinion, is to weaken the State; for if the Opinion be shaken, the State totters. But the Christian Religion is a Foundation, that settles and keeps it steady, being as *Mount Zion*, not to be removed.

But to return, It is observable, and very much to purpose, That Jesus Christ, although in his time, there were *diversities* of *Opinions*, and some of very ill nature and aspect, even on all Religion; for besides the *Pharisees*, the *Essenes*, and the *Herodians*, there were the *Sadduces*, that denied Angels, and Spirits, and a Resurrection; yet he never took occasion to intimate any Duty, as incumbent on the Magistrate, to take cognizance of *them*, and penally to animadvert upon them; nor doth he once reprove the Magistrate for not doing it, nor is there any intimation of such a duty in all the writings of the Apostles; which evidenceth what I said before, that the Magistrate (as so) is concerned but in *Natural* Religion, and not in the *Christian*, except as it becomes a Law of the State.

The only Method that Jesus Christ and his Apostles have obliged to even in case of *Heresies*, and have recommended both by their Examples and their Precepts, is to combat them with the Sword of the Spirit,
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that is, to reason against *them* from the Word of God; and, in case of obstinacy, to withdraw from the Communion of the Heretick. Indeed, in case of *ill manners* and of *Blasphemy*, (of the *former* the incestuous person, of the *latter Hymeneus* is an Example;) I find them *giving up to Satan*, which, according to the sentiments of some, being an act of punitive and coercive Power, vested but in the Apostles, whilst there was no Christian Magistrate, doth seem to intimate, that where there is, he may (yes he must) in such cases, (cases of *ill manners*, and of *Blasphemy*) take Cognizance, and use coercive and penal Animadversions, and indeed this is the proper work of Magistrates.

But for Matters of Opinion, not clearly and infallibly decidable from the word of God, in which men of good and upright Conscience may have different lights; Matters of no *malignant Influence* upon the State, (*such as Popery* hath) or on the Societies of Christians, in these (matters) I cannot find the Magistrate hath any thing to do, no, nor Ministers neither, but to endeavour to convince and persuade, and to rectifie mistakes (if any be) in such a manner as may manifest the due regard & value, they have for upright and well meaning, though erring and mistaking Conscience. *Let us walk together in things in which we agree*; and for others, *refer them to the day that will declare*. We are all to stand before the Master, and he must Judge.

And certainly it would much import to the healing of our Breaches, and to allay the Heats and Animosities that reign amongst us, if we more regarded the *Conscience*, they, who do dissent from us, do make, and the good designs and ends they aim at, than the very *Opinions and Practices* themselves in which they dissent; for in the *former* all good Christians agree, and in the *latter* will ever differ; we ought highly to value and honour tenderness of Conscience, and Intentions directed to the Glory of God, and the common good of the Church, and of the World, wherever we find them, though we never so much differ in the subject matters of that Conscience, and of those good Intentions.

This was the Healing Principle, on which the Apostle proceeded, when he said, he that keepeth a day, keepeth it to the Lord, and he that keepeth not a day, keepeth it not to the Lord; thus, with a grain of Christian Moderation and good Temper, He, at that time, reconciled the most distant and contradictory Practices and Opinions; 'tis as if he had said, the *former* he believeth the Law of God given by *Moses*, that commandeth the observation of Days to be still in force, and therefore keepeth a day, because he believeth the Lord will have him: the *latter* better understanding the nature of the Gospel, and the true extent of Christian Liberty, that we are not under the Law, but under Grace, and redeemed hereunto by the pre-

cious Blood of the Lord Christ, *he* doth not keep the legal days; & it is in honour to the Lord Christ, & to the Redemption purchased by his Blood, that he doth not.

And here, let us bethink how far a Principle of this kind would go towards healing, in our present differences; They, who do Baptise Infants, do it to the Lord, they, who do it not, do it not to the Lord; the former believing that the Covenant of *Abraham* is the Covenant of Grace, are persuaded, that the Lord will have them do it; the latter believing that all things are become new, and that we stand not on the old *Basis*, are persuaded that he will not. So he that kneeleth in the Sacrament, doth it to the Lord, and he that kneeleth not, kneeleth not to the Lord; the one believeth that in the act of receiving, when Jesus Christ doth give himself, he cannot take that unspeakable Gift, from such a Hand, too reverently, too humbly, and therefore (He) expresses that Humility and Reverence with his Knee: the other believeth, that the Lord Christ inviting him unto his Table, obliges to the use of that gesture, which may intimate the friendship and familiarity (that) by such an Invitation he is taken into, and therefore he sits or uses a Table gesture, as Christ and his Disciples did. In a word, men of good and upright Consciences, think they may conform to the Worship as it is by Law established, because they think the Rites and Ceremonies in it, are no other than what are decent

decent, and also think the Officers of the Church im-
powered by our Lord Christ, to institute and order in
points of decency, and those that do *so* conform, con-
form to the Lord: But on the contrary, others persua-
ded that the Lord Christ, as being faithful in all his
House, hath himself instituted all the necessary Officers,
and made all the necessary Orders, and there being Of-
ficers and Orders in the Church, that they cannot find
Example, or command for in the Scriptures, therefore
they conform not; and as the former in conforming,
do conform to the Lord, so the latter in not conform-
ing, do not conform in regard to the Lord.

As for *Separations* into several, and distinct conven-
tions, which on the former Principles will unavoidably
follow; for those of the same Opinion will unite and
convene together, and so divide from others; Birds of
one Feather will be flocking and associating: I see no
cause of fearing any greater Inconvenience in *them*, to
the Church, or to the State, if mutual Toleration and
Indulgence be the received Principle, than is in so ma-
ny several *Clubs* of friendship, or *Companies* of Trade;
for however different, they may be from one another
in other respects, in this they will all agree, to love
one another, for that of God they see, & to maintain the
publick Liberty, the common Interest of all; and so,
though they are as *many Conventions*, as you can imagine,
(and the more the less dangerous, one will ballance ano-
ther) yet they are not *factions*.

It is the belief of Infallibility, and the *damning Principle* of the several Opiniators (therefore to be condemned *itself*) that is the cause of all the hatred, heat, and animosity among them, and of the Designs they all nourish to exterminate one another; *this* turns Opinions into *Factions*, dangerous to Church and State; *Mischiefs* not to be avoided, even under State-Toleration, and Indulgence, as long as one Opinionator *damns* all others, *which* every one, who impropriates Salvation (a fault, yet too general) to his own Opinion and Method, doth by Implication *do*. Else, different Opinions would not create Trouble in a State, any more than different Garbs and Fashions; 'tis damning spoils all: *But who art thou that judgest and condemnest another mans Servant? Judge not that ye be not judged.* Yet on the other hand, there is, I think, no other way of preventing the inconveniences and dangers, that threaten a State, which settles on any *one particular Opinion*, without Indulging and Tolerating of *others*. but what is equally Hazardous and Tirannical, *viz.* To mop the Eyes of the Subject, and keep them in perpetual Darkness; either by obliging them to a blind submission to some (External or Internal) Authority, or by forbidding all Schools and Learning, all Preaching and Disputing, &c. It being Ignorance only that can be the Mother of such Devotion. A truth evinced both in the Tirannical Method of *Turkey*, and in that of the Papacy; and few

few but will think such Methods unsafe, because uneasie, and the darkness must be thick darkness too; for a Liberty but in Philosophy, will in the consequence draw on a Liberty of thinking in Divinity.

In fine, it is worth the observing what befel Philip 2d. King of *Spain*, that rigid and inflexible assertor of Uniformity in Worship, who, to one of his Ministers of State, that represented to him the danger of losing all by severe, bloody Proceedings in *Flanders*, and therefore advised him to some connivence and temper, alledging the Example of the neighbouring Countries of *France* and *Germany*, answered, *That he would rather be without Kingdoms, than enjoy them with Heresie.* And he was taken to his word; for this Inexorable, Lofty Prince, because he would not enjoy with Heresie, (as he called it) the Noble *Provinces*, now known by the name of United to all the World, became divested of them indeed; and he that would not keep them by Moderation and Temper, did deservedly lose them by (his) severity and Obstinacy.

This is the summ of what I said in that Discourse, to which, because you have confined me. I will not offer now, what more I have to say concerning the Subject of it; Only you may please to take the Judgment of two of our wisest, and most celebrated Princes: 1st King *James*, in his Speech to the Lords and Commons at *White-Hall*, March 21. 1609. *I never found that*
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Blood and too much severity did good in matters of Religion: For besides that, it is a sure Rule in Divinity, that God never loves to plant his Church by violence and bloodshed. Natural Reason may even persuade us, and daily experience proves it true, That when men are severely Persecuted for Religion, the Gallantness of many mens Spirits, and the Willfulness of their Humours, rather than the justness of their Cause, makes them to take a Pride, boldly to endure any torments, or death itself, to gain thereby the Reputation of Martyrdom, though but in a false shadow. 2d. King Charles 1. in his Declaration 1641. For differences amongst our selves for matters indifferent in their own Nature concerning Religion, We shall in tenderneſs to any number of our loving Subjects, very willingly comply with the Advice of our Parliament, That some Law may be made for the Exemption of tender Conſciences from punishment or prosecution for such ceremonies, and in such cases, which, by the Judgment of most men, are held to be matters indifferent, and of some to be absolutely unlawful.

To which most illustrious suffrages I will add the Testimony of the learned Mr. Chillingworth, both in regard of the great Authority and Reputation he hath in the World, and also of the Reason and Moment of what he says. "Require (saith he) of Christians, only
 "to believe Christ, and to call no man Master, but
 "him only; let those leave claiming of Infallibility,
 "who have no right unto it, and let them that in their
 "words disclaim it, disclaim it likewise in their acti-
 "ons.

“ ons. In a word, take away Tiranny, which is the
“ Devil’s Instrument to support Errours, and Supersti-
“ tions, and Impiety in the several parts of the World,
“ which could not otherwise withstand the Power of
“ Truth, I say, take away Tiranny, and restore Christi-
“ ans to their just, and full Liberty of Captivating their
“ understandings to the Scripture only. An universal
“ Liberty thus moderated, may quickly reduce Chri-
“ stendom to truth and Unity.

This is so smartly, so fully, so excellently penned
by that great man, that I am persuaded the delight
and pleasure you will take in reading this one *Para-*
graph, in conjunction with what I have given you, as
the sense of those great Princes, K. J. and K. C. will
make sufficient compensation for the longsom exer-
cise you had in all that preceded it; and therefore to
leave you in the same good humour and pleasantness
in which I found you, and that you may go off with a
Relish, I think it time to write my self,

S I R,

Your Humble Servant.

